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FM REO BASRAH

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0892

INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0470

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0930

C O N F I D E N T I A L BASRAH 000040

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 7/6/2019

TAGS: PGOV SOCI PINR PREL PTER IZ IR

SUBJECT: BASRA: OMS LEADER FEARS MILITARY KILLING WILL HURT EFFORTS
TO MODERATE MILITANTS

CLASSIFIED BY: John Naland, Leader, PRT Basra, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Senior OMS (Office of the Martyr al-Sadr) leader Sheikh Mohammed al-Furaji expressed concerns about the June 21 killing of Ahmed Rahman Jasim, a member of Jaysh al-Mahdi, who he claims had no ties to Iranian-backed militant groups. Though the military operation that resulted in the killing was approved and conducted by Iraqi forces, Jasim's family and friends blame the U.S. for his death. The sheikh fears the killing will undermine his efforts to moderate militants, and will bring into question his cooperation with the U.S. End summary.

¶2. (C) PRT Basra contacted Sheikh Mohammed al-Furaji, a senior leader of political wing of the OMS, for his reaction to news reports the shooting of Ahmed Rahman Jasim on June 21. Sheikh al-Furaji, who had just returned from the funeral, repeated the following assertions made by Jasim's family: The killing took place without any warrant being issued. It occurred in a residence where Jasim was staying (possibly a second family home), and was brutal (Jasim was shot over 15 times and the body was thrown in the street). Because the U.S. military participated in the operation, Jasim's brother, who has video footage of the killing, blames the U.S. -- not the Iraqi special forces -- for Jasim's death.

¶3. (C) A U.S. Military officer at the PRT confirmed that Jasim was killed in an operation that was approved by Basra Chief of Police General Adl. Basra Operational Command was also informed. Our U.S. military contact said that a warrant had been issued for Jasim's arrest, and that the Iraqi team sent to arrest him came under fire and returned it, killing Jasim. U.S. Navy personnel who work as advisors to the police unit were present during the operation.

¶4. (C) Sheikh al-Furaji said that Jasim had been a member of Jaysh al-Mahdi, but not of any of its Iranian-backed splinter groups, such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), which are comprised of former JAM members recruited and trained as pro-Iranian militants. Al-Furaji expressed frustration with the killing, stating that it undermined his efforts to moderate militants. The killing of Jasim in his home sent a signal, especially to Iranian-backed militants, that even if they renounced their militancy, they could be targeted, Furaji said. The sheikh added that the involvement of U.S. troops in the killing put him in a bad situation, raising questions among his supporters about his cooperation with the U.S.

¶5. (C) Bionote: According to our bilingual/bicultural interpreter, Sheikh Mohammed al-Furaji is an anti-Iranian nationalist, who has some credibility among pro-Iranian groups because of his extended exile in Iran prior to 2003. He oversees the political wing of OMS in five provinces, including Basra, and is reputed to have great influence within Jaysh al-Mahdi. Al-Furaji has ambitions to serve in the national parliament.

NALAND